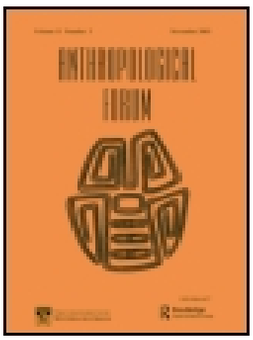

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Emergent Axioms of Violence: Toward an Anthropology of Post-Liberal Modernity

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ABSTRACT

This collection highlights the diverse and complicated ways that violence becomes axiomatic, namely through political rhetoric, epistemological impositions, and colonial legacies. Considering how axiomatic violence emerges from events of rupture as well as slow-moving structural inequalities, authors interrogate both the novelty and mundane quality of the current political moment. Approaching violence as axiomatic expands the conceptual lexicon for discussing how rhetorics, metaphors, and prescriptive assumptions can be inherently violent and become normalised, losing their event-like status. Through the routinisation of the extraordinary, truths become indisputable. Axioms combine neoteric and foundational violence to lend legitimacy to apparently incontestable categories of domination, disenfranchisement, and epistemological governance.

KEYWORDS

Violence; axioms; politics; colonialism; populism

Introduction: Emergent Axioms of Violence

More than ever, violence is constitutive of global politics and public discourse. Traces of axiomatic violence populate practically every domain of daily life. By axiomatic, we refer to the rhetorics, metaphors, and prescriptive assumptions engrained in political speech and policy that are inherently violent, but which have become normalised, taken for granted, and have emerged from an 'event' to become constant in everyday life. Often historically rooted in the hegemonic power relations of Western imperialism and associated inequities of gender, race, and top-down conventions of commemoration and reconciliation that bespeak a vision of epistemological supremacy, the violences have real-world consequences, played out on US streets in the policing of African Americans, in the governance of migration in the Mediterranean, among Indigenous communities across the Americas and in Australia, and around the dinner tables of families in Brexit Britain. Emergence holds manifold temporalities – historically embedded tensions that bubble away under the surface to gain potency at a time of political crisis; new social orders that seemingly explode onto the scene without precedence, rapidly acquiring a sense of permanence; and present-day turbulences that contain the anticipation of

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violence in the near future. In all cases, there is the feeling for contributors to this collection that violence has colonised the everyday, is more readily accepted as part of our informants' life-worlds.

Throughout North America, Europe, and beyond, an era defined by civility of public discourse has been shattered, replaced by crude definitions of 'free speech' that verge on inciting hatred towards women, the working classes, political opponents, old Cold War enemies, minorities, refugees – the list is endless. The global financial downturn of the last decade has triggered a desire to reassess the post-war political *logos* that was broadly focused on promoting universal human rights under the auspices of the global liberal democratic order. Consequentially, a series of violences have become omnipresent from the level of international governance to cafeteria conversations and workplace relations. Presidents, Prime Ministers, elected officials at all levels, as well as everyday publics, are given to a newfound willingness to express violent propositions that incite even more belligerent responses, cementing the ideological polarisation that has become a defining feature of the present. These rhetorics operate as axiomatic truths and resonate widely for their avowed rejection of what actors across the contemporary sociopolitical landscape increasingly perceive to be a tired, old, and corrupt status quo, remnants of an anachronistic era of liberal modernity.

To illustrate the point, let us take recent events in the UK, since it is a context with which we are familiar. Since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, political leaders have stoked the fires of division, starting with policies of austerity and structural economic reform that disenfranchised the everyday citizen by returning capital to the hands of those who were responsible for grievous financial mismanagement. From 2008 onward, austerity in southern Europe and the United Kingdom was accompanied by increased anti-immigrant sentiment fuelled by job scarcity, financial precarity, and a political strategy of underscoring a notion of 'limited good' (Foster 1965; du Boulay and Williams 1987) that casts migrants as illegitimate recipients of costly public benefits. Anti-immigrant sentiment increased after the 2016 Brexit referendum, with the Leave campaign launching an advertising blitz that capitalised on the concurrent Mediterranean migration crisis. Perhaps the most infamous example of this manipulative theatre came in the form of then United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage's 'Breaking Point' posters depicting the Balkan refugee train with a plea to 'take back control of our borders'. However, lighter-touch, subliminal, messaging also targeted the sense of impending violence from a menacing Other, such as a widely circulated Leave campaign flyer that implied both Turkey and Syria were on the verge of joining the EU, a claim intended to spur anxieties about Europe's absorption of large numbers of apparently culturally incommensurate peoples that this would allegedly entail. The fact that Syria bordered Iraq was also noted, posing a continuous potential line of people moving from a Middle Eastern conflict zone to the UK. During this time, migration from Eastern Europe was also regularly framed in televised debates as a recent phenomenon linked to the ills of European freedom of movement, altogether disregarding much longer histories of movement to and from European shores dating back more than a century.

From the events of economic crash and Brexit vote, the UK (and much of Europe) emerged onto a pathway lined with intolerance and a broadened sense that there were no taboos in what constituted freedom of speech. The events sparked new forms of social conflict – often framed as 'culture wars' – experienced by some as dramatic

rupture, as well as providing fuel for the fire of slow-burning animosities with roots in empire and the tentacles of British imperialism. Sudden rupture or 'business as usual writ large' (Edwards, Haugerud, and Parikh 2017, 1), for all parties concerned the events carried a sweeping affective atmosphere that 'nothing would ever be the same', that the UK had been wrenched from its trajectory in modern liberalism.

Over the course of the last decade, as the eventedness of the economic, migration, and Brexit crises has died down, attitudes toward austerity and immigration promoted by national political figures have become normalised and accepted as 'a sign of the times', which, at best, was to be endured, or perhaps has even faded from the public imagination entirely. Protests against exploitative financial practice now seem quaint features of a bygone era. The very public act of decimating European citizen rights has become an everyday occurrence that barely raises an eyebrow. The silent uneasiness of migrant fruit-pickers on the streets of St Andrews, Scotland, the day following the Brexit referendum, is no longer an anomaly, but the normal condition; heads down, quick strides, striving to pass unseen. The earth-shattering events have given way to the relentless rhythmic humming of inherent violence, an uneasy intimacy that has come to mark the current status quo – ever-present, familiarised, the background noise of life in the UK today. From these events emerged violences that have become axiomatic.

On the occasion the Conservative government threatened to break international law in negotiations on leaving the EU by going back on a binding agreement on post-Brexit trade, Boris Johnson's former attorney general, Geoffrey Cox told *The Times* newspaper that 'When the Queen's minister gives his word, on her behalf, it should be axiomatic that he will keep it, even if the consequences are unpalatable', accusing Mr. Johnson of promising 'to observe obligations with his fingers crossed behind his back'. We suggest that previous axioms of political posturing, which inferred – rightly or wrongly – a bond of trust in political leaders to not intentionally fan the flames of division and hate, have been replaced by underlying axioms of violence that have become part of the structure of quotidian life. Publics have become so engulfed in the new status quo that has emerged with the upending of civic norms that once defined political process, that elected officials' most bombastic utterances are no longer afforded attention. The juggernaut of axiomatic violence keeps rolling, gathering populist support from once marginal groups. The reader in North America will likely find resonances with our opening claims, as axioms of violence are perhaps even more forthright in US politics, with much written on the fake news and propaganda of the outgoing Trump administration (McGranahan 2017; Hodges 2018), part of what Carrithers (2009) identifies as 'public rhetoric culture'.

The routinisation of the extraordinary leads to what Daniel M. Knight (2020, 2021) has termed 'societal Stockholm Syndrome', the uncomfortable comfort felt when a crisis has become endemic, generating a new 'common sense' about the way things are (Herzfeld 2019, 133). The normalisation of critical events, such as the painful economic reforms of crisis Greece on which Knight writes, can, in extreme cases, lead to once sceptical publics justifying or shrugging off the violence of their persecutors. As a crisis becomes routinised and an intimate familiarity with axioms of violence is fostered, strangeness becomes ordinary (Lepselter 2019, 535) and there is a widespread resignation in the face of the overwhelming force of the new reality. This is the Stockholm Syndrome effect of being held captive by violence over an elongated period. Indeed, to instil a

sense of resignation seems to be the objective of those with the power to influence what Laura Bear terms 'technologies of imagination' (2015, 2020) – governmental apparatuses that encourage people to imagine difference and speculate about possible futures. Shifting forms of governance as distributed through rhetoric culture, bio-political and bureaucratic technologies direct people along particular pathways of imaginative becoming (also Holmes 2013). The ultimate goal of routinising violence as axiomatic is to incite resignation through systems of governance by what Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch term 'structures of feeling that promote cynicism about the ability to alter social structures', eventually making resignation 'a dominant mode of political action' (Benson and Kirsch 2010; 474 in Knight 2015, 239). Perhaps Michael Herzfeld (2016, 11) most eloquently captures the most supreme form of resignation when he suggests that the shoulder-shrug is the ultimate gesture that events directed from powerful outsiders cannot be influenced.

Of course, the axiomatic violence that we propose as a new spacetime in Western politics also describes the long-term status quo in contexts of settler-colonialism and structural inequality. It is our intention in this collection to highlight the emergent nature of long-term violence alongside violence rising from the sudden rupture of a violent event – how historically embedded, often colonial, axioms of violence take on renewed fervour and transformative meanings in the political moment. Here, fundamental aspects of world-making familiar to subjugated populations gain public traction and become recognised as politically decisive. We contend that emergent axiomatic violence need not be pinned to one temporal trajectory, rhythm or timeline. A heavy shower of political rain or an economic landslide lays bare that which has been hidden or silenced for decades, perhaps centuries, to wider publics (cf. Pipyrou 2020). Such might be the case, for instance, of the new tide of racism apparent in British sport – groomed in the sidelines by leading members of the UK government – that has accompanied the prominence of the Black Lives Matter and taking a knee movements. Here the axiomatic racial tensions associated with centuries of empire have emerged in new light in the current political moment.

It may not be necessary for a nation-state to have been part of the coloniser–colonised dichotomy in the traditional sense for its people to experience long-term structural inequalities on the international stage. Herzfeld (2002) offers an intriguing reading of political structures and social orders that underpin the pretence of modernity in contexts outside of the mainstream definition of colonialism. He terms the relationship 'crypto-colonialism,' which is 'a claim to national independence grounded in an idiom of cultural and territorial integrity largely modelled on Western exemplars … and restricted by the practical needs and intentions of the Western colonial powers' (2016, 10). He shows how Greece and Thailand have been shaped by the desires of Western powers – from revelling in stereotypes of antiquity and supporting conservative politicians (Greece), to mapping the modern nation-state (Thailand). In both cases, 'independent' nations were led in a 'process of cultural self-purging that they also equated with a model of political purity' (2016, 10). While under a pretence of independence, the crypto-colonised state reflects in many ways its designers but sits low on international comparative gauges of moral and political order. The underlying crypto-colonial bureaucratic and cultural systems become most apparent in times of crisis when the dynamic between the Great Powers and local communities are brought into sharp relief. As a notable example,

institutionalised corruption in crypto-colonising or crypto-colonised countries are assessed differently by the international community and by multinational organisations, making the double standard plain for all to see. Crypto-colonialism is, for Herzfeld, a slow-moving, protracted arrangement fundamentally embedded in the social history of many nation-states, the bare bones of which are only exposed through events of national turmoil which gain global interest.

It is here where we wish to engage with existing concepts of slow violence, the everyday forms of subordination and suppression that millions around the world experience daily. Slow violence captures the grinding discriminations of exclusion based on gender, race, and political tyranny; what Ahmann (2018) alludes to as the little things of slow-motion erosive violence that eats away at the person. The 'gradual brutalities' of slow violence operate at multiple temporalities and may not at first glance be considered as particularly destructive since they have shed their eventedness – they remain dormant in their political potential, set to emerge (Davies 2019, 1). Yet it is the repetitive erosive nature of their accumulative force that wears down the person. Drawing popular attention to the term, Rob Nixon (2011, 4) asserts that,

> Violence is customarily conceived as an event that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence … incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.

For Ahmann, it is the relationship of violence to temporal distortion, in particular the manner in which a social rupture readily becomes routinised, that grinds away at the moral apparatus of society. This is to say, once violence ceases to be an event – a 'Bosnian war', a 'Greek crisis', a 'Rwandan genocide' or a 'Lost Generation' – moral uproar soon recedes, media shifts focus elsewhere, and shocking violence settles into a chronic everyday rhythm. For the people experiencing the violence there is a sense of resignation that eventedness is required to change the status quo, to give their cause popular attention. It would seem that the historicisation of violence, locating axioms within their spatio-temporal coordinates, is vital and is a topic of contention for authors in this collection (Kidron, Manley, Sorge, this issue). Much of the slow violence experienced by marginalised groups today has its roots in colonial legacies of disenfranchisement and objectification that continue to feed the contemporary political moment (Henig, Kearney, this issue). Likewise, epistemological assumptions of morality feed historically embedded world-views of difference that continue to be manifested as the slow violence of racial, ethnic, and class inequality. As well as multifarious temporal directions, these assumptions are regularly imbued with spatial (West–East, Global North-Global South) hierarchical flows of moral knowledge (Kidron, Henig, this issue). The temporalities and trajectories of emergent axioms of violence – their historicities, presentist forms, and futural orientations – is a topic explored throughout this issue.

Three Dimensions of Axiomatic Violence

An axiom, so the Ancient Greeks would have it, is an indisputable truth whose legitimacy is based exactly on its incontestability. The etymological root of the word axiom is the Greek *axiōma* meaning 'what is fitting'. Ranging from commonly held assumptions

that have gained traction over the course of time, to mundane definitions, axioms frame prior reasoning and organise a trail of beliefs, assertions, and principles. Through their unquestionability, the Ancient Greeks believed, axioms offer clarity in reasoning. Precisely because axioms are 'timeless', or the foundations of when, why, and how they gained hegemonic status have been 'lost in time', they are notoriously difficult to challenge. To do so, in Foucauldian terms, would require fearless speech, where the speaker 'must be in the position to take a risk, to potentially lose something, incur anger, put friendships on the line, invite scandal, lose debates, and even run the risk of death' (Pipyrou 2016, 7–8). Yet the fearless speaker will always appear less powerful than those who claim the axiomatic truth, since being critical of the political status quo incurs choosing the risk of death over 'a life of security, flattery, and silence' (Pipyrou 2016, 8). Under these criteria, in the contemporary political sphere fearless speakers to axiomatic truth might include Black Lives Matters activists, campaigners on the #MeToo movement, or those who challenge hegemonic discourses in Australia's History Wars. The routinisation of violence, inequality, and moral hierarchies through political and bureaucratic technologies of imagination entrenches resignation quantitatively more than it stirs fearless speakers, precisely because of the risks involved in challenging power and the limited channels available to do so.

In this collection we consider three forms of axiomatic violence which we trace within their spatio-temporal coordinates. The first is the type of divisive political rhetoric present in much of contemporary politics today, where policies that would have once caused public uproar and widespread moral outrage, pass with increasingly less notice, or are dismissed as 'just another' aspect of the age of crisis in the West (Manley, Sorge, this issue). The second pertains to the lasting effects of imperialism and systems of colonial rule, where power relations of subjugation and disenfranchisement remain axiomatic (Kearney, this issue). Whether classic settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006), forms of crypto-colonialism which remain locally unacknowledged (Herzfeld 2002), or 'wolf in sheep's clothing' neo-colonial projects promising new forms of social collaboration (Knight 2017), colonial power continues to deliver axiomatic violence in multiple guises. Finally, we consider axiomatic violence where Western epistemologies are unproblematically superimposed upon local contexts, with unanticipated consequences (Henig, Kidron, this issue), or indeed when they are the target of forms of critique that represent absolutist visions in their own right. From models of commemoration, to post-war peace plans and conceptual debates within the discipline of anthropology, often well-intended assumptions are rendered violent when one considers the ethnographic detail and local points of view. In their respective articles, the contributors address the temporality of axioms of violence, how propositions of violence can become naturalised, undetectable, uncontested, uncannily woven into everyday life to emerge at specific times and in particular contexts. Evinced through the rise of right-wing nationalism, increasing anti-immigrant feeling and xenophobia, everyday racism, and colonial power relations, axioms of violence are challenged by fearless speakers at times promoting cultural relativity, liberal democratic ideals, community solidarity, and local and indigenous knowledge systems. Through comparative ethnographic intervention, authors in this collection expose the naturalisation of violence in the everyday to better discern their sociological wellsprings as well as their ideological foundations.

In part, this answers Das and Kleinman's (2000) call for anthropologists to consider the operation of long-term violence and the manner in which it seeps into the micro-crevices of everyday life, weaving through personal and interpersonal narratives over timescales of decades and generations. The 'poisonous knowledge', they suggest, is 'folded into intimate interpersonal relationships' where global power takes on local form (2000, 10). Global flows of violence in the guise of foreign policy, disaster relief programs, financial colonialism, and Western epistemological hegemony, are rendered at the grassroots level as 'multiple forms' of localised violence that 'animate local worlds and the individual lives in them' (2000, 5). From Das and Kleinman's reading of historically and culturally embedded violence comes two core concerns of the present collection: the relationship between global flows (rhetoric, policy, knowledge) and local particularity, and the circumstances connecting the emergence of new and long-term axiomatic violence.

In attempts to unpack the historical roots and contemporary politics of axiomatic violence along the lines of rhetoric, colonial legacies, and hegemonic epistemologies, contributors demonstrate how interlocutors confront poisonous knowledge across multiple scales – through forms of governmentality, engagement with global movements, and the questioning of interpersonal relations. In doing so, they interrogate how certain axioms have become the building blocks to create legacies of violence where, as Hannah Arendt (1970) would have it, a language of legitimating violence has emerged with the establishment of scientific world-views (Henig, Kearney, Kidron this issue). Dominant world-views that – given time and the right political environment – become axiomatic, riddled with the language of biopower which implies that certain groups of people are 'devoid of subjectivity' and 'expendable'. Histories of expendability are perhaps most prominent in settler colonialism, where unincorporated spaces are deemed 'empty' to obscure the violent erasure of people and lives in the name of capital and state, justified by the cleansing of backwardness through the pursuit of 'hygienic modernity' (Lynteris 2018, 110; also Dzenovska and Knight 2020). The violence here is twofold, embedded in population control and domination, as well as the imposition of 'superior' moral and cultural norms.

We do not suggest a repetition of primordial stories of state-inflicted violence through conquest, but rather encourage a detailed assessment of the spatio-temporal coordinates of axiomatic violence and their emergent forms in the present, considering the lasting and sometimes silent/silenced effects of historically embedded power. It is vital to acknowledge the historical context in which axioms of violence emerge and how deeply engrained power relations give credence to current iterations of violent identity politics. Equally, it is important to piece together how long-term violence is provided new impetus in the current political moment and is invested with potentiality to shape collective futures. This includes situations where grand narratives of domination and subjugation push people to imagine themselves 'in violence' as a mark of distinction from the Other. A defining trait vis-à-vis other groups is precisely being the subjects of axiomatic violence, stuck in a spiralling network of ascriptive identities.

Building on the line of scholars of violence and identity politics, we propose a detailed consideration of the emergent forms of poisonous knowledge that give rise to axiomatic violence, and how these are negotiated in the everyday lives of our interlocutors. The model of axiomatic violence identifies the ways in which violence acquires 'fact-like'

qualities over time and in place (Pipyrou and Buck 2014; Sorge 2015); how violence may be narrativised through personal and intergenerational accounts that explicitly contest a hegemonic historically embedded line; how violence may remain locked in pockets of silence. As Stavroula Pipyrou has argued, the 'violence of silence' is monstrous and engenders the subjectivities of the violated (2018, 2020). Very often, the coordinates of axiomatic violence – narrativised or long-silenced – are located in the process of nation-building and the struggle for independence, what Schwartz (1997) has identified as the almost biblical foundational relationship between violence and identity formation (for example, Fanon 1959; Barth 1969; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Beaton 2009).[1] In all papers in this collection, the creation and technocratic management of national and sub-national identities plays some role in the installation of axioms of violence.

Apart from narrativised violence gaining fact-like quality and the violence of silence, we recognise another axiom; the anticipation of not-yet-realised violence, felt in the present but always located just over the temporal horizon, waiting to happen. The violence punctuates the present since the groundwork has been laid for its actualisation (for instance, through political rhetoric or past experience); the anxiety of waiting for the event is in itself a violation of the Self. Anticipatory violence generated by the 'fear and the threat of violence' (Datta 2017, 174), is encountered in a wide scale of realities from accounts of domestic abuse (Brunson 2011; Wies 2011) to conflict zones where fragile peace agreements may at any time be punctuated by acts of aggression provoked by historical, political, and religious grievances (Bryant and Knight 2019). Sami Hermez (2012, 2017) has explored how the anticipation of violence permeates ordinary life in Beirut, leading to an underlying state of anxiety and uncertainty. Suggesting that the 'absent presence' of violence causes war to be a permanent existential condition even in peacetime, Hermez describes how everyday activities – such as buying a generator, stocking-up on diesel, or sharing anxious laughter – are affected by a grey-zone of almostness and not-quite violence. Over the border in Israel, Joyce Dalsheim (2015) suggests that 'there will always be a Gaza War' since violence is encountered beyond the event itself. She explains anticipatory violence through a 'consciousness of duration' – the folding-in of knowledge of the violent past with a projection of anticipated futures that together constitute a living history (see also Das 2007). Violence is axiomatic here in punctuating the present even in times of peace with anticipation becoming an inherently violent temporal orientation. Here, emergent violence is not associated solely with the event itself, but rather events (such as missile attacks, kidnappings, upscales in political propaganda) that punctuate an axiomatic truth which bubbles under the surface of daily life to be revealed in the performance of everyday tasks. Anticipatory violence emphasises the need to better acquaint ourselves with the spatio-temporal coordinates of each specific ethnographic case.

Liberalism and the Populist Moment in the West

Through the three dimensions of axiomatic violence that we identify as contemporary rhetoric culture, legacies of colonialism, and epistemological hegemony, this collection of papers further interrogates the unapologetic resurgence of chauvinistic desires that threaten the existence of social arrangements that define liberal modernity. Such axioms of violence are inextricably connected to a range of cultural assemblages that

arise out of liberal modernity. One such instance that we wish to unpack here is the current moment of widespread populist emergence that witnesses a return of repressed sentiment barely sublimated by the civic norms of liberal democratic life, which we locate within a legacy of Euro-American expansion and its deep history of power. The tidemarks of this history are present within the democratic and civic institutions of modernity, and refracted through forms of scientific knowledge, economic rationality, and legal principle that maintain hegemonic primacy over Western publics and also secure the aims, ethics, and values of settler colonial society (Mazzarella 2019; Rosa and Bonilla 2017).

Populism's diminished commitment to the principles of deliberation and debate that underpin the liberal democratic order furthers the axiomaticity of forms of violence that appear as symptomatic of a rapid transformation of collective sensibilities that we can only read as a rupture with earlier norms and values of civic life. As such, while manifestations of rhetoric culture, legacies of colonialism, and epistemological hegemony are certainly not new, these have burst forth with an unexpected intensity in the last decade, taking central stage within a radical reconfiguration of public culture throughout the West and beyond. Abstract principles of fair play and even-handed dialogue are helpless in stemming the onslaught. Indeed, as recognised not least by Fukuyama (1992) as by demagogues who exploit the outward signs of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2019, 134) with disenchanted working classes and minorities disillusioned by the apparent 'end of history,' liberal democratic values do not sustain strong sentiments. But more than this, late liberalism's corporatisation of the state generates a reaction on the part of disenchanted folk that finds catharsis in breaking all the rules of an extant order that they believe to have been structured to suit political and economic interests wholly not their own. The mobilisation of this rage into a theatre of anti-establishment animus generates no alteration in the status quo, as, behind the scenes, the consolidation of elite interests continues apace. The plain-spoken down-to-earth style of the charismatic populist figure is but a smokescreen that obscures the corporate elite's uncontested pursuit of its self-interest, where the harnessing of popular disaffection secures the necessary electoral support to enable legislation that further exacerbates the inequities that yielded disaffection in the first place. That this should be plain to see is hardly a novel claim. For example, in addition to turning the US Presidency into a family affair, Donald Trump's first appointments to his cabinet in 2016 were fellow billionaires, including a Goldman Sachs banker as Secretary of the Treasury (Steven Mnuchin), an anti-labour Secretary of Labor (Andrew Puzder),[2] and a darling of the petrochemical sector as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (Scott Pruitt).

Populism relies on a transversal alliance between and among groups with divergent social and political interests that are united under a strident appeal to 'the people' (see Kapferer 2018, 12ff). As Walley (2017) reminds us, the emergence of Donald Trump relied on electoral support that cut across the class spectrum, and voters from the US rustbelt were only one, and not necessarily the principal, of the demographics responsible. The Trump coalition was comprised of voters hostile to immigration, opposed to free trade and the loss of manufacturing jobs, troubled by a political establishment's ties to high finance, and included college-educated suburbanites concerned about law and order, small business owners resentful of taxation, as well as a hodge-podge of white supremacists, vocal misogynists, and conspiracy theorists. The resentments that

fuelled such a coalition were directed against a liberal cosmopolitan class that populists allege to be the masters of an inequitable order. The axioms of violence that concern us here are the distillates of a newfound popular swagger that has burst forth with confidence and posits a radical alternative to the order of a technocracy that Thomas Friedman (2018, 354) describes as:

> a new bourgeoisie of media, political and academic elites, self-appointed to rule the brave new globalized world, which in reality is something closer to and rapidly approaching a *Blade Runner* world of enclavized populations in a state of low intensity warfare.

Axioms of violence unfold within the dialectics between 'communities of discontent' and the larger political entities that encompass them ultimately rupturing the social contract that governs the relationship between majorities and minorities within liberal democracy (cf. Kirtsoglou 2010). The accelerants of this rupture are manifested in several interconnected processes associated with globalisation, industrial decline and its socioeconomic consequences (Friedman 2018; Walley 2017), as well as increased immigration, multiculturalism, and the resultant destabilisation of identities (Eriksen and Schober 2016). Such dislocations accelerate the manifestation of severe anxieties felt as an existential threat to the certainties of majority domination. In this environment of accelerated change (Eriksen 2016), axiomatic violences proliferate, offering fleeting catharsis and an illusion of access to power in a moment where evanescent release holds no politically redemptive potential. Minorities inevitably bear the brunt of the consequences of this irruption of resentments for reasons that, premised upon a normative set of cultural definitions, radically destabilise their categories of belonging (Appadurai 2006).

New forms of digital sociality further exacerbate the fragmentation of publics and the prevalence of a media landscape that offers competing social, political, and economic visions crafted to niche interests (Hamborg, Donnay, and Gipp 2019, 393; Pipyrou 2018). The inevitable outcome is a systematisation of divergent sets of meanings that pertain to shared existential questions, and their subsequent dissemination to polarised audiences that has the effect of curtailing the potential for any reasoned debate premised on 'truth' or factuality. The retreat of social facts from public conversations has generated a post-truth world where sophistry and spin are integral to what is masked as political debate, and the digital has come to play a key role in forms of political innovation that reflect such dynamics (see Liston 2020). The fearless speakers, as discussed in Foucauldian terms above, who speak truth to power are marginalised further and tarnished as irrational – either becoming exoticised or pathologised, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos argues, as power silences resistance 'by depoliticizing it as illogical or idealizing it in out-worldly terms' (2014, 415).

As Douglas Holmes (2000) explains for the period preceding the populist explosion of the twenty-first century, right-wing integralism always despised immigration from the Global South because it represented an instantiation of those forces of neoliberalism and globalisation that threatened the integrity of the culturally homogenous and economically sovereign European nation-state that provided for the realisation of self, family, and community. As right-wing integralism enters the mainstream and claims central ground in politics and society in the West and beyond, we are called to note that the recrudescence of patterns of axiomatic violence presents a central paradox of globalisation. Namely, late modernity's planetary visions generated the very closures it

rejected, just as new technologies of digital communication that offer up the potential for a frictionless global flow of images and ideas has erected new barriers and polarisations that amplify ideological chasms.

Populist Rhetorics, Epistemological Impositions, Colonial Legacies

The authors here speak to the three dimensions of axiomatic violence in interconnected ways. Populist rhetoric culture entwines with narratives of the glories of Empire, and epistemological impositions and the legacies of colonialism remain in initiatives of global governance. In all cases, the authors critically reflect on the axioms of violence present in the imposition of Western epistemological and governance ideals which overlook local forms of knowing the world. Some take issue with epistemological impositions by suggesting that assumed moral hierarchies constitute an axiomatic violence that unwittingly makes common cause with right-wing populism and cultural authoritarianism.

For Henig (2021), it is specifically the discourse of tolerance that permeates liberal thought which imposes an ideological structure premised on the unacknowledged assumption that differences breed intolerance, and that these must be overcome through a concerted effort to recognise worth in the Other. Thus, the regime of tolerance enforced through international governance is a form of axiomatic violence since it silences other systems of ethical orientation premised on vernaculars of coexistence and solidarity. He asks whether the 'virtues and practices of tolerance (are) the only way to understand how individuals and communities carve their lifeworlds in a non-violent way … be they religious, cultural or ethnic?' Henig argues that the discourse of tolerance is proselytised to the extent that it has become an axiomatic violence that eventually produces precisely what it claims to alleviate. A focus on coexistence, on sharing and on charity, as it manifests in socially significant spaces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as the public kitchens, reflect a desire for conviviality that is a far cry from a simple ethics of toleration imposed by the West. We are thus presented with an alternative to the 'axiomatic logic' that 'the liberal value of tolerance is taken as the peaceful state … and violence as its ultimate nemesis'.

In an examination of post-conflict reconciliation in Cambodia, Kidron (2021) also presents a case of epistemological imposition, in this instance of forms of commemoration that upset local understandings of how to come to terms with collective trauma. Kidron shows how Khmer regard Western forms of commemoration as foreign constructs, and their tangible artefacts – monuments to genocide victims – only serve to upset Khmer notions about grief, alerting readers to the fact that the experience of trauma is not reducible to a set of universal psycho-social responses or therapies. Rather than calling for improved cultural competency of vernacularised memory work, Kidron identifies the 'incommensurability of the taken for granted core Euro-Western mnemonic axiom (and scenario) that retrieval of the painful past and its public representation may somehow promote healing, rehabilitation and future conflict prevention'. Whereas Human Rights models of reconciliation are based on finding peace with the traumatic past, the present and future-focused temporalities of Buddhism mean that 'peace is contingent upon the release not only of anger but avoidance of memory'. We are left with the question of how best to approach reconciliation in

this context, addressed through vernacularised practices that resonate with local worldviews and temporal orientations in their full autonomy.

Epistemological imposition may be most starkly evidenced in circumstances of colonial incursion that structure Indigenous-settler relations in settler-colonial contexts. Kearney (2021) explores the existential condition of indifference toward Indigenous needs, interests, values, and cosmologies that animates the lifeworld of the settler colonial actor, and manifests in an ontology of 'failing to care.' Through ethnography set at the destruction of an ancestral Dreaming site, Kearney unpacks the logic of coloniality along lines of 'axiological retreat' and 'ambivalence' where she identifies a naturalization and concealment of violence. She argues that while ambivalence might seem 'an innocuous state of mind, a feeling without consequence', when applied to settler colonial contexts it is 'a telling indicator of the lasting effects of frontier violence' shaped by a certain epistemic approach. In Australia, the whitefella of the outback embodies an unquestioned, axiomatically violent way of being-in-the-world – a world without Dreaming – standing as the agentive figure who instantiates the encompassing society's default morality. In his most heroic representation, he is the pioneer who tames the Australian frontier through actions that desecrate sacred sites and thus negate the very existence of Indigenous people, generating what Kearney describes as the 'repugnant self' of settler coloniality. She concludes that the repugnancy of coloniality, whilst concealed through statehood, is 'writ large every time a Dreaming ancestor or place is harmed'.

Struggling with the paradoxes of reconciling the abhorrent self, Manley (2021) discusses the fallout in Scotland of the 2016 Brexit vote. With the Scottish National Party (SNP) emerging as an entity committed to countering the axiomatic forms of violence represented by both Westminster and the anti-Europe Leave campaign, European Union citizens and liberal Remain voters in Scotland have been drawn into supporting a nationalist party. Manley reminds us of the messy temporalities of axiomatic violence that converge in an event like Brexit, even from the perspective of members of a single political party. For Unionists, the violence was sudden, unexpected, bursting from an unforeseen rupture in the social fabric. For Scottish nationalists, the violence of Brexit was to be expected, the cumulation of centuries of (crypto-)colonial domination by the English. Manley also addresses a third perspective, that of the EU migrant who lives in constant anticipation of futural violence.

Taking the theme of migration that is prevalent in nationalist discourse across Europe, Sorge's (2021) contribution focuses on the often taken-for-granted view of migration as a source of insecurity, indeed even as an existential danger to the integrity of local life. In Sicily, a study of rural migrant resettlement reveals a structure of axiomatic violence that revolves around the moment when large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers arrive from across the central Mediterranean passage. Local anxieties are a resource that populist actors are ever ready to exploit, doing so by reference to a reconstituted understanding of Sicily's past as defined by civilizational and religious confrontation. However, these attitudes do not go uncontested, and the island is home to several civil society organisations – activist collectives, youth groups, labour unions, and social cooperatives – that advance an open and inclusive vision for the future. At the same time, resettlement practices themselves reinscribe a range of violences that hinge on the sublimation of the migrant body to expectations

of productivity, where newcomers must adapt to their roles as members of a surplus population and tackle the economic circumstances they encounter. As Sorge argues, resettlement may exacerbate migrant subjection rather than alleviate it, a reality that becomes especially disquieting in light of the remunerative nature of resettlement work and its 'susceptibility to capture by organized crime.'

In all, this collection highlights the diverse and complicated ways that axioms of violence have recently emerged through an entanglement of rhetoric cultures, epistemological ideals, and colonial legacies. Emergent axioms of violence hold multiple temporalities – from explosive and unexpected events come accepted 'new normals', slow-burning animosities are ignited with renewed vigour, and structural uncertainty haunts future-planning. As the event loses its eventedness, so people become accustomed to living in violence, familiar with the status quo, an air of resignation sets in. The violence has become axiomatic. Considering the complex temporalities and origin points of axiomatic violence provides a fuller appreciation of both the novelty and mundane quality of the current political moment. By approaching violence as axiomatic we aim to expand the conceptual lexicon for discussing how rhetorics, metaphors, and prescriptive assumptions are inherently violent and become normalised, losing their event-like status. Through the routinisation of the extraordinary, truths become indisputable. Axioms combine neoteric and foundational violence to lend legitimacy to apparently incontestable categories of domination, disenfranchisement, and epistemological governance.

Notes

1. One may note the deliberate attempts to rewrite history in the education curricula of both the US and UK where the past is being redrafted in an attempt to foreground national glories and greatness over tolerance and alterity.
2. Nominated but would later withdraw his candidacy.

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